

Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning

Thomas R. Guskey, Jane M. Bailey

These are unedited notes on the book

Guiding Premises

- The primary goal of grading and reporting is communication
- Grading and reporting are integral parts of the instructional process
- Good reporting is based on good evidence
- Changes in grading and reporting are best accomplished through the development of a comprehensive reporting system

Basic Questions

- *Why should we change our current grading and reporting methods?* (Chapter 1)
 - Problems inherent in current grading and reporting practices
 - Potentially detrimental effects of these practices
- *What have we learned about grading and reporting over the years?* (Chapter 2)
 - Lessons from the past and more research evidence are frequently ignored
- *How can we use our knowledge base to improve grading and reporting practice?* (Chapter 3)
 - Several broad guidelines for improving practice
 - Aspects for which we have strong evidence
- *Why are report cards not enough?* (Chapter 4)
 - Problems from implementing report card reform
 - Attempting to do too much with a single reporting device
 - Solution lies in developing a comprehensive, multi-faceted reporting system
- *What grading methods work best?* (Chapter 5 & 6)
 - Relative strengths and shortcomings, common fallacies
 - Letter grades
 - Percentage grades
 - Other categorical grading methods
 - Standards-based grading
 - Pass/fail grading
 - Mastery grading
 - Narratives
- *How do we grade and report on the achievements and performance of students with special needs?* (Chapter 7)
 - Special adaptations to better communicate information about
 - Students with disabilities
 - English language learners
 - Gifted or talented students
- *What special problems need to be addressed in grading and reporting?* (Chapter 8)
 - Use of technology
 - Computerized grading programs

- Grade inflation
- Commonly employed grading practices that can have damaging effects on
 - Learning
 - Self-confidence
 - Motivation to learn
- *Are there exemplary models of reporting that educators find to be working well?* (Chapter 9)
 - Novel approaches to report cards and other reporting forms
- *What guidelines can be offered for better grading and reporting systems?* (Chapter 10)
 - Reporting tools to include in a comprehensive reporting system
 - Set of guiding principles for educators to follow to ensure effective communication and enhancement to student learning

Chapter 1

- *Why should we change our current grading and reporting methods?*
 - Problems inherent in current grading and reporting practices
 - Potentially detrimental effects of these practices

Current practice based on tradition

We continue to use certain practices not because we've thought about them deliberately or evaluated them thoroughly but, rather, because it is easier to do what we have always done.

Grading – exercise in professional judgment

- Collection and evaluation of evidence on students' achievement or performance over a specified period of time.
- Various types of descriptive information and measures of students' performance are converted into grades that summarize students' accomplishments

Reporting – process by which judgments are communicated to parents, students, or others

Little change over the past century

Recent new developments in education have made it imperative to give serious attention to these issues

- The growing emphasis on standards and performance assessments makes current reporting practices inadequate
 - Educators no longer satisfied with just basic skills
 - Focus on authentic problem solving
- Parents and community members are demanding more and better information about student learning progress
 - Public that doubts the quality of education and educators
 - Negative tone and diminished trust
 - Demanding more information

- Advances in technology allow for more efficient reporting of detailed information on student learning
 - Challenges and opportunities
- Grading and reporting are recognized as one of educators' most important responsibilities
 - Teachers constantly engaged in grading and reporting
 - Most teachers have little formal training in this area
- There is growing awareness of the gap between our knowledge base and common practice in grading and reporting
 - "We've always done it this way."
 - "That's what was done to us."
 - Standard 5 for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students, "Teachers should be skilled in developing valid pupil grading procedures which use pupil assessments."
 - Combine sources of information to generate grades
 - Articulate how those grades reflect students' performance and teacher's value of that performance
 - Standard 6, "Teachers should be skilled at communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators."
 - Knowledge of assessment results and what they mean
 - Ability to translate results in such a way that others can make sense of them

Grades – unreliable measurement

- Teachers consider different things
- Significant variation in grading practices
- Depends on quality of assessment information and on procedures used to derive the grade from that information
- Recognize the importance of looking for consistency in that evidence and to understand inconsistency as a signal to look deeper and to search for reasons why
 - Improves validity
 - Promotes better student learning
- Teachers need to know how to assign grades or other reporting marks in ways that maximize validity and reliability
- Teachers need to know how to communicate classroom assessment information in ways other than grades
- Teachers must advocate change in these methods when the change would result in clearer communication of classroom assessment results

Teachers' Perceptions of Grading and Reporting

What methods do you use?

Elementary

Attempting to use standards-based reporting systems that include checklists of competencies and narrative reports

Experienced difficulties in helping parents make sense of the forms

Express personal dilemmas – evaluative aspects run count to their perceived role as teachers – want to advocate and they must judge

Secondary

Grade book, spreadsheet, columns of numbers and symbols

Mathematical formulas, percentages, weighted averages, statistical software

Why do you grade?

Elementary

We have to

Parents and administrators demand it

Secondary

Parental demands

College and university admission requirements

Most teachers don't like grading

Troublesome

Time-consuming

Counter to major responsibilities as teacher (engaging students in a variety of high-quality learning experiences)

Would like an effective reporting system that would enhance these instructional responsibilities rather than detract from them

Sources of Teachers' Grading Practices

- The policies and practices they experienced as students
- Their personal philosophies of teaching and learning
 - Major purpose to identify the various talent levels of students, ranging from those who display exceptional ability and skill, to those who may need specialized assistance
 - Emphasize evaluative nature of grading
 - Use grades to recognize excellence in the performance of a few students
 - Object to sorting and selecting functions and instead insist that their major purpose is to develop talent and foster personal growth in all students
 - Stress the communicative and formative functions of reporting
 - Using reporting to facilitate the learning process
- District-, building-, department-, or grade-level policies on grading and reporting
 - Ambiguous
 - Teachers have little role in developing them
 - Feel compelled to follow them
- What they learned about grading and reporting in their undergraduate teacher preparation programs

Because the influences are uneven, practices vary widely. Students have to figure out a new set of grading practices and rules in each class. Some are highly skilled at deciphering differences, understanding the consequences and manipulating each system to their advantage; others are unaware and confused, often suffering tragic results.

Students' Perceptions of Grading and Reporting

Elementary years - See grade as the teacher's summary judgment of their work and their accomplishments over a specific portion of the school year

Middle school years – Change due to shift from formative aspects to summative aspects of grading - Regard grades as the major commodity teachers and schools have to offer in exchange for their performance

This change causes a shift in students' focus away from learning and toward what they must do to obtain the grade commodity.

Grade commodity takes on great value for those who are successful in acquiring it

Those who are less successful attach less importance and consider it irrelevant

Instead of asking "What are we going to study?" or "What will I be learning?" students are asking, "What must I do to get a good grade?"

Points dominate the academic economy of classrooms

Points can be gained through actions outside of academic performance – "The Eddie Haskell Effect" - politeness, neatness of work, effort they appear to be making, behavior in class, their appearance

Emphasis on earning points diminishes the value of learning

Means of summarizing appraisals becomes an end in itself

Appears to bring objectivity and precision, but objectivity and precision are more imaginary than real. They detract from the central purposes of teaching and learning

Emphasis on points is not an immutable characteristic of grades or grading and reporting systems

Thoughtfully designed grading and reporting systems that emphasize the formative and communicative aspects of grades can maintain students' focus on important learning goals.

Parents' Perceptions of Grading and Reporting

Want change

Are not enamored with new forms of reporting

Ideas are limited by narrow array of practices they experienced as students

Involve parents in the change process

Need well-designed, high-quality parent education programs

Most parents would like more detailed information more regularly (doesn't have to be a report card, though)

Want a jargon-free form that they can understand

Prefer letter grades because they understand what they communicate information clearly, and they are easy to interpret

Are confused by terms used by educators and misinterpret them – emerging, developmental

Want practical suggestions as to how to help their children

Parents' Perceptions of Teachers

What do you most want to know about your child's teacher?

What teacher characteristics are most important to you?

- The teacher is competent
- The teacher cares about their child as an individual

Chapter 2

- *What have we learned about grading and reporting over the years?*
 - Lessons from the past and more research evidence are frequently ignored

We know a great deal about grading and reporting.

We have known much of what we know for a long time.

A lot of what we know has not found its way into practice.

Our knowledge and understanding with regard to some aspects is just beginning to develop.

Problems with Subjectivity in Grading

1912

2 English papers graded by 142 teachers – ranged from 64 to 98 and 50 to 97

Subjective feelings about papers, neatness, spelling, and punctuation

Some focused on grammar and style; others only cared about communication of the message

Geometry papers graded by 138 teachers – even greater variation – scores from 28 to 95

Some deducted points only for a wrong answer; others took neatness, form, and spelling into consideration

Move to scales with fewer and larger categories

Grading on the curve – distribution of test scores along a normal probability curve

Some schools abolished grades

Some went to pass/fail

Some others advocated a mastery approach

Some note students' progress on specific skills

Multiple grades in each course to separate achievement from learning skills, work habits, effort

Effects of Grading on Students

Students who received standard comments with their grad achieved significantly higher scores than those who received only a score and a grade

Those who received individualized comments did even better

- Excellent! Keep it up.
- Good work. Keep at it.
- Perhaps try to do still better?
- Let's bring this up.
- Let's raise this grade!

Grades may not be essential for teaching or learning, but they can be used in positive ways to enhance students' achievement and performance

Positive effects can be gained with relatively little effort on the part of teachers – standard comment stickers or stamps

Nature of comments is important – emphasize high expectations, importance of students' effort, teachers' willingness to work with students to make improvements "Let's...."

Chapter 3

- *How can we use our knowledge base to improve grading and reporting practice?*
 - Several broad guidelines for improving practice
 - Aspects for which we have strong evidence

Grading and Reporting Are Not Essential to Instruction

Primary purpose of grading and reporting is other than facilitation of teaching or learning

Regularly checking on students' learning progress is an essential aspect of successful teaching

To facilitate learning, teachers must provide students with regular and specific feedback on their learning progress

Feedback must be paired with explicit guidance and direction for making improvements when needed

Checking is different from grading.- checking means finding out how students are doing, what they have learned well, what problems or difficulties they might be experiencing, and what corrective measures may be necessary

This is a diagnostic and prescriptive process between teachers and students

Grading and reporting typically involve judgment of the adequacy of students' performance at a particular point in time – this is descriptive and evaluative

Dual roles are discomfoting to teachers with a child-centered orientation

Recommendation:

Teachers must seek an appropriate balance between the formative, instructional purposes of assessments of student learning, and the summative, evaluative purposes required in grading. Not all evidence needs to be included.

Mastery learning strategies – regular formative assessments, structured, teacher-directed corrective activities immediately following each assessment

More assessments to gauge improvements

Grading and Reporting Require Subjective Judgments

All grading and reporting is subjective

The more detailed and analytic the procedures, the more likely the subjective elements will influence the results

Holistic scoring is more reliable

Detailed and analytic tools yield better learning tools

Subjectivity isn't always bad – doesn't mean they lack credibility or are indefensible

Teachers know their students, understand various dimensions of their work, and have clear notions of the progress made

Recommendation:

Valid grading is not a mechanical process. Mathematical precision or technology does not make it more valid

Teachers must be clear about grading standards, the various components that will be considered in determining grades, and the criteria that will be used to evaluate those components.

Grading still involves thoughtful, reasonable, imperfect human judgment

Bias Must Be Avoided in Grading and Reporting

Cultural differences

Appearance

Family backgrounds

Lifestyles

Perceptions of students' behavior

Gender - Boys are more often affected than girls

Neatness of handwriting

The order in which papers are graded

Recommendation:

Training programs can help teachers identify and reduce negative bias effects

Grades Have Some Value as Rewards, But No Value As Punishments

Most students view high grades as positive recognition of their success, and some work to avoid the consequences of low grades.

No studies support the use of low grades or marks as punishment. Instead of prompting greater effort, low grades more often cause students to withdraw from learning. To protect their self-images, many regard the low grade as irrelevant and meaningless. Other students may blame themselves for the low grade but feel helpless to make an improvement.

Some teachers view grades as weapons of last resort. Students who do not comply with their requests must suffer the consequences of the greatest punishment a teacher can bestow: a failing grade. Such practices have no educational value and, in the long run, adversely affect students, teachers and the relationship they share. Rather than attempting to punish students with a low grade or mark in the hope it will prompt greater effort in the future, teachers can better motivate students by considering their work as incomplete and then requiring additional effort.

Eliminate failing grades – A, B, C or I

Students submit failing work because teachers accept it

If it's not done well, it's not done.

Additional funding necessary for support mechanisms – after-school, make-up sessions, Saturday programs, summer school

Highly successful and in the long run save money – less remediation needed later

Recommendation:

Seriously think about using failing grades

Better and more effective alternatives to failing grades need to be found

Grading and Reporting Should Be Done in Reference to Learning Criteria

Grading and reporting should always be done in reference to specific learning criteria rather than in reference to normative criteria or on the curve

Learning becomes a competitive activity – a game of winners and losers

Competition should be against the standard, not against each other

Grading on a curve tells nothing about what students have learned or are able to do

Only tells relative standing

Difficult to interpret at best, meaningless at worst

As students with lower grades dropped out, those who were previously successful became the ones who failed

Recommendation:

Grades based on specific learning criteria (not on the curve) have direct meaning and serve well the communication purposes for which they are intended

Alternative Strategies for Selecting Valedictorians

Choosing just one valedictorian causes undue competition among students

Sometimes additional arbitrary criteria are created

Some high schools naming multiple valedictorians – much the way colleges use magna and summa cum laude

Teachers see role as that of developing talent not selecting talent

Recommendation:

Recognizing excellence is a vital aspect in any learning community

It can and should be based on clear models of excellence that exemplify our highest standards and goals for students and ourselves, not arbitrary standards

Clarifying Learning Criteria

When grading and reporting relate to learning criteria, teachers are able to provide a clearer picture of what students have learned and are able to do.

Types of Learning Criteria in Grading and Reporting

- Product criteria
 - Summative evaluation of student achievement and performance at a particular point in time
 - Final exams

- Final products (reports or projects)
- Overall assessments
- Other culminating demonstrations of learning
- Process criteria
 - Product criteria do not provide a complete picture of student learning
 - Reflects how the students got to the final product
 - Effort
 - Work habits
 - Quizzes
 - Homework
 - Class participation
 - Attendance
- Progress criteria
 - Most important to consider how much students have gained from their learning experiences
 - Well-defined set of credible learning standards that include graduated levels of performance
 - Measured over time not at a specific moment in time
 - Differentially paced instructional programs
 - Special education programs

Teachers rarely use product criteria solely

Use some combination of the three types

Vary criteria student to student, taking into account individual circumstances

Result is a hodgepodge grade – interpretation of this is difficult

Product criteria alone would be less subjective, but is not seen by teachers as acceptable

Recommendation:

Establish clear indicators of product, process, and progress criteria and then report them separately

Chapter 4

- *Why are report cards not enough?*
 - Problems from implementing report card reform
 - Attempting to do too much with a single reporting device
 - Solution lies in developing a comprehensive, multi-faceted reporting system

Factors Contributing to the Difficulties in Grading and Reporting Reform

1. Changes focus on *form* rather than *function*.
2. Leaders lack understanding of the change process.
3. Efforts center exclusively on report card reform.

The Basis of Good Reporting is Good Evidence

1. Validity
 - a. Appropriateness and adequacy of interpretations made from the information gathered

- b. Validity is always specific to a particular interpretation or use
 - c. Construct validity is frequently undermined by construct-irrelevant influences (performance is affected by knowledge, skills or traits other than those the assessment is intended to measure)
 - d. Validity is a matter of degree – not all or none
- 2. Reliability
 - a. Consistency of assessment results – at different times and/or with different raters
 - b. Assessments can be highly reliable but not valid
- 3. Quantity
 - a. Any single source of evidence can be flawed or misinterpreted
 - b. Must use multiple sources of evidence in grading and reporting student learning – more evidence is usually better evidence
 - c. Must have balance of evidence gathered for instructional purposes (formative) and for grading and reporting (summative)
 - i. It would be inappropriate to use results from formative quizzes constructed to check on students’ learning progress or from homework assignments designed to offer additional practice on difficult concepts or skills in determining students’ summative grade
 - ii. Teachers fear if it “doesn’t count,” students won’t be motivated so everything counts in these rooms
 - iii. Problem with this approach is that it imposes severe limitations on the learning process, restricts students’ creativity, and limits their expression.
 - iv. If students understand formative assessments and are given specific feedback, guidance, and direction on how learning errors can be remedied before a more comprehensive summative assessment, dramatic improvements in student learning result

The Purposes of Grading and Reporting

- 1. To communicate the achievement status of students to parents and others
- 2. To provide information that students can use for self-evaluation
- 3. To select, identify, or group students for certain educational paths or programs
- 4. To provide incentives for students to learn
- 5. To evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs
- 6. To provide evidence of students’ lack of effort or inappropriate responsibility

Recommendation:

Reform initiatives should begin with inclusive, broad-based discussions about purpose that involve various stakeholders – message, audiences and goal of communication

The Importance of a Reporting System

Expecting any grading procedure or device to satisfy multiple purposes is extremely dangerous

Reporting procedures need to serve multiple purposes

Parents want information that they can understand on how their child is doing in school, and they want to receive that information on a more regular basis (doesn't have to be a report card)

Efforts that focus on particular tools without first considering their purpose inevitably fail

Form must follow function –purpose must precede process or format

Tools That Might be Included in a Multifaceted Reporting System

- Report Cards
- Notes attached to report cards
- Standardized assessment reports
- Phone calls to parents
- Weekly/monthly progress
- School open-houses
- Newsletters to parents
- Personal letters to parents
- Evaluated projects or assignments
- Portfolios or exhibits of students' work
- Homework assignments
- Homework hotlines
- School web pages
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Student-teacher conferences
- Student-led conferences

Recommendation:

Development of multifaceted reporting systems with reporting tools that serve different but well-defined purposes

Different types of information should be shared with different audiences in order to enhance instructional processes and improve student learning outcomes

Statements of Purpose

Write purpose of each reporting tool directly on the device – give aim of tool, audience, and how the information might be used

Set of reporting tools may vary depending on the context – elementary systems may be different from middle and high school systems

Sources of Grading and Reporting Evidence

Most teachers use multiple sources of information in determining students' grades, but they vary widely in the particular evidence they consider and in the procedures they use to combine or summarize that evidence

Usually represent a combination of product, process, or progress criteria

Typical Sources of Grading and Reporting Evidence

- Major Exams or Compositions
 - Must be well-aligned with established achievement targets and have clear scoring procedures (product)
 - If pre and post assessments are considered, these can be used to assess progress as well as product
- Class Quizzes
 - Best suited for formative purposes (process)
- Reports or Projects
 - Allow students to demonstrate higher levels of learning
 - Permit alternative forms of expression
 - When accompanied by clear scoring criteria or rubrics that articulate qualities of good work on a descriptive continuum, can represent definite product grading criteria
- Student Portfolios
 - Collections of students' work
 - Most have summative purposes – product
 - Some can be formative – allow students to reflect on their work and try to improve it
 - Others are designed to show students' progress over time by showing early and later work samples
- Exhibits of Students' Work
 - Typically represent product grading criteria
 - Valuable learning tools that help students articulate the qualities of good work and learn to recognize those qualities in their own work
 - Students benefit through the process of selecting examples, articulating the reasons, and assembling those examples
- Laboratory Projects
 - Can offer valuable information on process
 - Most often are evaluated in terms of product, however
- Students' Notebooks or Journals
 - Considered an instructional device
 - Some teachers evaluate in terms of process
- Classroom Observations
 - When related to specific criteria clearly communicated to students, these yield product information
 - Can be used for formative purposes – process or progress criteria
- Oral Presentations
 - Can take many forms
 - Can denote product criteria when directed toward clear achievement targets and are accompanied by specific scoring criteria or rubrics
- Homework Completion
 - The way most teachers consider homework does not reward students for completing homework but punishes students for not completing them
 - If homework is assigned to aid students' learning, then it's difficult to justify lowering the grade of otherwise high-performing students for assignments not completed.

- Researchers suggest that missing assignments for poor performing students are more a symptom than a cause of learning difficulties
 - Homework completion reflects process
- Homework Quality
 - Homework is best suited for formative purposes to help identify and remedy students' learning problems
 - Homework quality represents process
- Class Participation
 - Process – formal or informal records may be kept
- Work Habits and Neatness
 - Some teachers give special credit for neatness and organization and penalize others whose work appears sloppy or careless
 - Possible to develop specific performance criteria for work habits and neatness – rarely done
 - Highly subjective - process
- Effort
 - Explicit criteria rarely identified – highly subjective judgments
 - Teachers use effort to give a break to only those students who would otherwise receive a low grade
 - Process
- Attendance
 - Process
 - Draw attention to important interaction between students during class sessions
 - Most often penalizes students for being tardy or missing class
- Punctuality of Assignments
 - Process – lower scores of students who turn in assignments late, regardless of quality of work or level of performance it reflects
- Class Behavior or Attitude
 - Process - most are ill-defined and inconsistently applied
- Progress Made
 - Multiple measures that can be used to demonstrate what has been gained or the degree of improvement
 - Requires articulation of clear indicators of progress along a descriptive continuum

Relating Evidence to Purpose

Some teachers base grades on 2 or 3 of these indicators and others incorporate evidence from 15 or 16

Teachers lack clarity regarding the purpose of grading and reporting, therefore it is hard to determine what evidence is most appropriate

Serious communication problems result when these various types of evidence are combined to yield a single grade or mark

Recommendation:

The solution lies in using multiple reporting methods that include multiple grades or marks – facilitates the communication process and can enhance both teaching and learning
Must help teachers develop good judgment and the good written, oral and interpersonal communication skills that such multifaceted reporting systems require

Chapter 5 & 6

- *What grading methods work best?*
 - Relative strengths and shortcomings, common fallacies
 - Letter grades
 - A,B,C,D,E or F
 - Plus and Minus Letter Grades
 - A+,A,A-,B+,B,B-,C+,C,C-,D+,D,D-,F
 - Percentage grades
 - 0 to 100%
 - Other categorical grading methods
 - Distinguished, Proficient, Apprentice, Novice,
 - Advanced, Proficient, Progressing, Beginning
 - Advanced, Proficient, Nearing Proficiency, Progressing, Starting Out
 - Extending, Acquiring, Developing, Emerging, Pre-Emergent
 - Standards-based grading
 - Steps in developing
 - Identify the major learning goals or standards that students will be expected to achieve at each grade level or in each course of study
 - Establish performance indicators for the learning goals or standards
 - Determine graduated levels of quality (benchmarks) for assessing each goal or standard
 - Develop reporting tools that communicate teachers' judgments of students' learning progress and culminating achievement in relation to the learning goals or standards
 - Pass/fail grading
 - Mastery grading
 - Narratives

Different grading methods can be combined to enhance their communicative value.
No one grading method is appropriate under all conditions.

Method	How Applied	Advantages	Short-comings	Effective Use
Letter Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate results of summative evaluations • Sometimes accompanied by descriptors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple • Most parents have experienced them and think they understand what they mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstraction of a great deal of information into a single symbol • Process, product, and progress in a single grade – confusing • Norm referenced versus criterion referenced • Cutoffs are arbitrary and difficult to justify • Lack richness to identify unique accomplishments, explicit learning strengths, specific areas of weakness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be based on explicit learning criteria • Use multiple grades to represent evaluations of different aspects of students' achievement • Separate marks for learning skills, work habits, and class behavior
Plus and Minus Letter Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more precise descriptions of students' level of achievement or performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents prefer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing number of rating categories lowers both reliability and validity • Potential influence of subjective elements increases • Added precision is far more imaginary than real 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not recommended at any level of education

Other Categorical Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To avoid damaging self-esteem of students, stigmatizing them, destroying motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More descriptive than letter grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and students translate them into letter grades • Many of the same drawbacks as letter grades because it is a single categorical label • Don't offer the kind of information that can be used to diagnose students' learning errors or prescribe remediation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate use of failing grades completely at lower elementary grade levels • Use more affirming, verbal grade-category labels • At higher grade levels, use an I and expect additional effort rather than assigning an F • Use category labels that are clear and meaningful to parents as well as students • Clarify specific learning criteria that each grade category or level represents
--------------------------	---	---	--	--

Percentage Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ultimate multicategory grading method • Often paired with letter grades • More popular in middle and high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for maximum discrimination in evaluations of students' achievement • Maximizes variation among students, making it easier to select and classify them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require abstraction of lots of information into a single grade • Accurate interpretation is extremely difficult • Reliability is diminished • Greater influence of subjectivity • Increased precision is far more imaginary than real • Cutoffs only increase the challenge for students to a degree • The degree of difficulty of the tasks that students are asked to perform or the complexity of assessment questions is a more significant consideration • Percentage cutoffs, without a careful examination of the questions or tasks, are just not that meaningful • The challenge or difficulty of any task is also directly related to the quality of the teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of categories decreases precision, objectivity, and reliability • Limit grade categories to 4 or 5 and offer separate grades for different aspects of performance • Provide a supplemental narrative description or standards checklist describing the learning criteria used to determine the grade for each aspect of the subject further enhances the meaningfulness of this information
-------------------	--	--	---	--

Standards-based Grading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List specific learning goals for each grade level • Indicate student's learning progress or achievement in relation to each goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful information about students' achievement and performance is offered to parents, students, and to others • Can be useful for diagnostic and prescriptive purposes if it is sufficiently detailed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes a lot of work • Identify learning goals • Decide what evidence best illustrates attainment of that goal • Identify graduated levels of quality • Develop reporting tools • Reporting forms are often too complicated for parents to understand • May not communicate the appropriateness of students' progress • Must be compared to the learning expectations that have been established for that grade level • Curricular differences makes this kind of reporting difficult in middle and high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage educators at all levels to consider the use of standards-based grading • Use two part marking system that indicates level of progress and relation of the level of progress to grade level expectations • Developmental differences in students must be taken into consideration and explained to parents • Different standards for each grade level or broad standards that are consistent across grade levels can be used • Well-organized meetings with parents to explain the standards and how to interpret the reporting forms are essential
-------------------------	---	--	--	--

Pass/Fail Grading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces the number of grade categories to two • Lessening the emphasis on grades, students would be encouraged to take more challenging courses • Minimum level of performance that is considered passing • Can require minimum level of performance on several components • Can base the pass/fail grade on a cumulative summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifies the grading practice for teachers and for students • Clear performance criteria can be set and communicated • Reliability is greatly improved • Learning environments can be more relaxed and attention more on learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little prescriptive information comes from the grade • Students spend less time studying for courses graded this way • Little incentive to strive for excellence in some situations (not true in medical school study) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value in most elementary and secondary settings is minimal • Add a category of pass with distinction or pass with honors as an incentive and as a means of recognizing students whose performance is outstanding
-------------------	---	--	--	---

Mastery Grading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces number of grade categories to just two • Instead of setting a minimum level of performance or competence, it sets the cutoff at a high level of learning excellence • Students are given multiple opportunities to meet the master grade standard • Taps students' internal and inherent motivation to succeed • Content organized into a series of learning units • Formative assessments are used to assure mastery • Summative assessments are used as an overall evaluation of students' achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only grading method based on a theory of student learning • Well-aligned with most teachers' instructional purposes • Brings clarity to grade interpretation – based on well-defined learning criteria and specific levels of performance • Similar to what most students will face throughout their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires extra time and work • Teachers must clearly specify criteria, prepare multiple formative assessments, set appropriate mastery performance levels, develop corrective and enrichment activities, and develop well-aligned summative assessments • Record keeping is more complex • Essential management skills are required on the part of teachers to manage multiple tasks occurring simultaneously, to motivate students to put forth serious effort on formative assessments, and to vary the pacing of instructional units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal in nearly all learning environments • Specified clear performance criteria • Allows teachers to provide students with valuable feedback and guidance • Cumulative evidence necessary for assigning grades is available • Issues with classroom management and record keeping must be worked out • Collaborative arrangements should be structured to reduce the amount of work involved for an individual teacher
-----------------	--	---	--	--

Narratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended written descriptions of student achievement and performance prepared by the teacher • More common in elementary but being used more often now in middle and high schools • Rarely used alone • Computerized narratives can provide sentences that describe major concepts as well as information about individual student accomplishments • Standardized comment menus are the briefest form of narrative grading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the potential to be the most specific and personalized • Can bring added clarity and richness to other grading methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the greatest variation among teachers • Time-consuming to prepare • The more teachers complete, the more standardized the comments become • Do not communicate the adequacy of students' performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives can be an important component in any grading and reporting system • Supplement other grading methods • Allow teachers to clarify the marks or grades they record • Teachers can prescribe solutions to identified learning problems • Can include a section for parents to complete • Provide professional development for teachers on the completion of narrative
------------	--	--	--	--

Chapter 7

- *How do we grade and report on the achievements and performance of students with special needs?*
 - Special adaptations to better communicate information about

- Students with disabilities
- English language learners
- Gifted or talented students

Students with Disabilities

Taught in separate classes

- Problem: separated students from socialization and other age-appropriate activities of their peers and sometimes led to educational experiences that were too low

Inclusion

- Problem: dilemma of how to make accommodations for students with disabilities so that their accomplishments can be recognized and, at the same time, be fair to the other students in the class

Grading Policies for Students with Disabilities

1. Applying the same grading standards to all students
2. Grading in terms of individual effort
3. Grading in terms of learning progress
4. Making specific grading adaptations

Policy	Advantages	Shortcomings	Recommendations
Same grading standard Adaptations to procedures is permissible, but standards should be the same	Students and parents need to know where they stand in reference to clearly defined goals	Majority of SE students received grade of D or lower year after year GPA's are low for more than half 1/3 have at least one failing grade Feel helpless to achieve higher grades and blame themselves Lose confidence and give up on academic pursuits Are at a high risk of dropping out of school Inconsistent with the goals of the Education of All Handicapped Children and IDEA	Least defensible approach to grading the achievement and performance of students with disabilities
Individual effort Recognize potential and recognize those who are putting forth	Seems humane	Impossible to accurately assess students' effort, especially in relation	May be helpful to record teachers' judgments of students' effort on

their best effort		<p>to their potential Sends the message that good behavior and good effort (not falling asleep) are the important criteria when it comes to grades Communicates low expectations for academic performance</p>	<p>a reporting form, but is inappropriate to base students' grades on effort alone</p>
<p>Grading in terms of learning progress Students' academic performance should be evaluated in terms of how much progress they make over a specified period of time Requires well-defined indicators of progress or benchmarks</p>	<p>Emphasizes individual accomplishment and improvement Promotes individual responsibility Allows students to gain self-respect through their accomplishments Well-aligned with the contractual aspects of the IEP</p>	<p>No guarantee that individual standards will be completely appropriate or sufficiently challenging When progress standards are individualized ,the grade means something different for each student Interpretation problems can result in court battles</p>	<p>Procedures for judging the adequacy of student progress should be spelled out within the IEP and should include the type and quality of work to be completed, timelines for completion and clear guidelines for assessment and evaluation Supplement learning progress grade with additional information about the student's standing relative to the learning goals, standards, or expectations established for that grade level or course of study Develop a learner profile that charts progress in relation to grade-level standards Offer multiple</p>

			grades – one for progress, another for achievement of grade-level or course standards Augment class grade with a separate IEP evaluation report
<p>Making specific grading adaptations</p> <p>Change grading criteria</p> <p>Provide supplemental information</p> <p>Use other grading options</p>	<p>Relatively common practice</p> <p>Teachers find it most helpful</p>	<p>Students with disabilities and those without differ in what adaptations they see as fair and unfair</p>	<p>Reasonable and appropriate</p> <p>Input from all stakeholders about which adaptations should be made</p> <p>Adaptations should be formalized and consistent</p> <p>Adaptations should be applied fairly and conscientiously</p> <p>Teachers must have the flexibility to make these kinds of grading adaptations</p> <p>Need skills to determine when such adaptations are appropriate</p> <p>Separate grades for progress, product and process</p> <p>Base grades on the accomplishment of the learning goals in the IEP</p>

Students Who Are English Language Learners (ELLs)

Accommodations used to obtain accurate assessment evidence

1. modifying or simplifying the English language used in assessment questions
2. including a glossary that explains the potentially unfamiliar or difficult words
3. providing extra time to complete the assessment

Only the first one serves to narrow the score difference between the ELL and non-ELL learner

Some teachers allow assessment adaptations, but apply the same grading standards

Others use individual grading adaptations

Providing supplemental information to clarify meaning

Noting specific improvements

Identifying areas where additional work is needed

Translations of reporting forms

Recommendation

It is essential that

1. grades reflecting the achievement of ELLs and level of performance be based on accurate and reliable evidence
2. information regarding teachers' appraisals of students' achievement and performance be clearly communicated

Accommodations are likely to be required in both assessment procedures and reporting devices

Schools should develop and publish policies that outline specific guidelines for teachers to use in making these necessary adaptations

A menu of adaptations

A process for selecting them

Specific procedures for documenting their use

Delineate adaptations that are inappropriate

Teachers must monitor the progress of students to determine whether the chosen adaptations are effective

Students Who Are Gifted or Talented

High marks may reflect past achievements more than current learning progress

Some G&T students have special learning needs that require special accommodations (even an IEP)

Specifies curricular needs of the student

Justifies placement in special classes

Ensure special services appropriate to student's unique learning characteristics

Alternative procedures for reporting learning progress

Three-step Process for Addressing Needs

1. allow students to show what they know and can do in reference to the curriculum
2. plan curriculum alternatives that allow gifted students to proceed to more advanced levels of learning
 - a. exploring topics in great depth
 - b. developing special projects
 - c. becoming involved in programs designed to accelerate their learning progress
 - d. in regular classroom or in specially assigned classes
3. implement these alternatives as enrichment experiences within the regular classroom or as activities in specially assigned classes
 - a. supplemental reporting form
 - i. outlines specific learning goals
 - ii. includes marks or grades that students attain in reference to those goals
 - iii. narrative section that describes learning progress, special strengths, areas where improvement or refinement might be needed
 - iv. portfolio of student work
 - v. provides more accurate and more detailed information
 - vi. allows teachers to set learning goals and expectations that are appropriate for their level of skill and ability
 - vii. communicates vital information to parents

Recommendation

Develop a supplemental reporting form to document teachers' appraisals of the achievement and performance of gifted and talented students

Collaboration will reduce the workload of teachers and enhance the quality of the products developed

Chapter 8

- *What special problems need to be addressed in grading and reporting?*
 - Use of technology
 - Computerized grading programs
 - Grade inflation
 - Commonly employed grading practices that can have damaging effects on
 - Learning
 - Self-confidence
 - Motivation to learn

Some educators may be offended by the discussion of these issues. Authors want, instead, to help educators view these issues from new perspectives and to reflect on them with new knowledge. We must build better grading and reporting systems.

Technology and Grading

Video Report Cards and Digital Portfolios

- Video recordings of individual students' performances
 1. dynamic record of what they have learned
 2. if done several times a year –clear and authentic record of learning progress
- Video portfolios – more formalized process than just some recordings
- Digital portfolios – broad array of work samples and exhibits of students' accomplishments

May not soon replace standard reporting forms, but greatly enhance the meaningfulness of the information included in these and other forms

Electronic Gradebooks

Provide teachers with an organizing framework that simplifies record keeping

Spreadsheet and databases make it easy to enter and precisely tally numerical information – especially useful in point-based systems

Shortcomings

- Many educators believe the mathematical precision yields greater objectivity
- Others believe that increased precision enhances fairness

These beliefs are not true!

There are different methods that teachers use to calculate grades using electronic gradebooks

- Arithmetic average of scores with all scores receiving the same weight
- Median or middle score
- Arithmetic average, deleting the lowest score

Most students would not receive the same grade using each of these methods

With some methods all students would receive the same grade even though their profiles are be very different

Many questions result:

Which method is fairest?

Which method provides the most accurate summary of each student's achievement and level of performance?

Do all students deserve the same grade or are there defensible reasons to justify different grades?

Etc etc.

Computerized grading programs do not solve the complex grading problems. The mathematical precision they offer doesn't make the grading process any more objective or any fairer.

Each teacher must still decide what information goes into the calculation, what weight to attach to each source of information, and what method will be used to tally and summarize that information

The teachers' professional judgment will always be an essential part of the grading process

Recommendation

Encourage educators to make thoughtful use of the various forms of technology

Remember their obligation (not lessened by technology) to ensure that marks or grades they assign are accurate, honest, and fair summaries of the quality of students' performance.

Weighted Grades

Many high schools assign a greater weight or credit to the grades earned in courses considered exceptionally challenging

Other schools adjust grading scales so that a B in an honors or AP course is considered equal to an A in a regular or general course

Some schools even assign less weight or credit to lower level or remedial courses

Weighted grades are typically justified on the grounds of fairness

Also seen as an enticement to students to choose a more challenging course

Two questions should be addressed before weighted grades are chosen:

- What is their true purpose?
- How will they be used?

In most schools they are used for the purpose of selection – honor roll and valedictorian

Apart from these purposes, they have little utility

No evidence that they serve to motivate students to enroll in more challenging courses

Recommendation

Students who attain a high level of achievement or performance deserve special recognition

Honor roll, letters, special commendations serve this purpose well

Weighted grades is an issue of selection, not an academic issue

Name multiple valedictorians by same procedure as colleges – magna and summa cum laude

Provides special recognition for students who have distinguished themselves academically while eliminating the detrimental effects that stem from the competition among students for that singular distinction

*Purposes of grading and reporting should drive decisions about methodology.

- If the purpose is to communicate teachers' judgments about students' achievement and performance to parents, students, and others, then weighted grades are difficult to justify.
- If the purpose is to select, identify, or group students, then weighted grades are significant.

Grade Inflation

Debate on grade inflation

Students receive high grades because of new grading schemes and teachers' concerns about students' self-esteem – teachers have relaxed their standards and grades are meaningless and have no validity

To counter this problem, teachers are encouraged to hold down grades and restrict the number of high grades they give

Careful research indicates the problem may be more imagined than real

Both college and high school studies show that the students are performing according to their higher grades on other measures such as SAT's.

Recommendation

Problem with grade inflation is not that more students are receiving higher grades, but with the meaning of the grades assigned. If the grades reflect teachers' judgments in reference to

clearly articulated learning goals or standards, then the meaning of those grades is clear. Best way to fight grade inflation is to fight for clearer standards. Developing more stringent guidelines for grading is not the same as raising learning standards. Popular assumptions as to how to address the question of standards (raising cut-scores, weighting grades, freeing teachers from external pressure, etc.) emphasize grades rather than standards. They focus on the yardstick rather than on what it measures.

The question that needs to be addressed is “What is the purpose of grading?”

If it is to discriminate among students, then we must maximize the differences between students. Nothing maximizes the differences better than poor teaching. Only those who are able to teach themselves learn well and receive high marks.

Maximizing differences is also accompanied by grading on the curve. Students are graded according to relative standing among classmates. A high mark only means they have performed better than others. This also makes learning highly competitive.

If the purpose of grading is to reflect how well students have learned, then we must clarify what we want students to learn and be able to do. Then we must identify clear criteria or standards by which their learning will be judged.

Teaching then becomes an organized and purposeful effort to help all students meet those standards. The goal is to develop talent, not simply to identify and select it.

Students’ grades in some classes might be higher because the standards are less rigorous. A comparison of related learning criteria would address this issue.

Defining clear learning standards and deciding what evidence best reflects those standards is hard work.

Questionable Grading Practices

1. Averaging scores to determine a grade
 - a. If the purpose of grading and reporting is to provide an accurate description of what students have learned, then averaging scores from past assessments with measures of current performance must be considered inappropriate
 - b. Learning is a progressive and incremental process. Should learning trials be considered in determining a grade? If the students demonstrate that they have learned concepts well and mastered the intended learning goals, then why should we include previous attempts and average them in when determining grades?
 - c. Any single measure of learning can be unreliable. Most researchers recommend several indicators. The most accurate depiction of the students’ learning at this time comes from the most current information.
 - d. Averaging has a detrimental effect on students’ motivation. If a student has done poorly in the past, they know that even if they perform at the highest level from that point on, they will have little chance of attaining a high grade.

Recommendation

- Teachers must look for consistency in the evidence they’ve gathered
- If the evidence is consistent, this is relatively easy. It is much more complex if the evidence has great variation.

- Most recent evidence should always be given priority
 - Most comprehensive forms of evidence should also be given priority
 - Adjustments must be made for some students who experience test anxiety
 - Rank the evidence in terms of its importance to course learning goals or standards
 - Offer multiple grades on different aspects of students' performance - product, process, and progress
2. The use of zeros
- a) A zero is not an accurate reflection of students' learning
 - b) Zeros are typically assigned to punish students for not displaying appropriate effort or responsibility
 - c) Profound effect of zeros when combined with the practice of averaging – little chance of success because such an extreme score so drastically skews the average.
 - d) Some educators defend the practice by arguing that they cannot give students credit for work that is incomplete or not turned in, but there are better ways to motivate and encourage students to complete assignments
 - e) One alternative is to assign an I for incomplete – required to do additional work to bring performance up to an acceptable level

Recommendation

Students should learn to accept responsibility and be held accountable for their work.

Assigning zeros does not help teach students these lessons.

Use of an I or incomplete is an alternative – it may require additional funding and support, but is worth it

3. Taking credit away from students or lowering their grade because of behavioral infractions
- a. Some teachers deduct from students' grades for classroom disruptions and other misconduct
 - b. Some reduce grades of students who miss a certain number of classes
 - c. Also vary widely on how they handle issues such as plagiarism, copying, and other forms of cheating

Recommendation

Behavioral infractions cannot be considered indicators of achievement or performance. They do not reflect product criteria. Including this information when determining grades yields an inaccurate representation of their learning.

Best strategy for considering behavioral infractions in grading is to offer multiple grades. If we report separate grades for product and process criteria, and include among the process criteria indicators of students' class behaviors or work habits, we can communicate this information to those for whom it has the greatest value: the students and their parents.

Although this complicates record keeping and grading procedures, the advantages in terms of better and more meaningful communication clearly outweigh those costs.

Summary

Advances in technology have simplified record keeping and enabled teachers to summarize large amounts of information in precise and efficient ways, but the mathematical precision they offer does not necessarily lead to grades that are more accurate, honest, objective, or fair.

Grading remains a process of professional judgment that demands continuous reflection on its purpose.

Evidence used in determining grades must denote what students have learned and can do.

Other factors should be reported separately.

Grading requires careful planning, thoughtful judgment, a clear focus on purpose, excellent communication skills, and an overriding concern for students.

Chapter 9

- *Are there exemplary models of reporting that educators find to be working well?*
 - Novel approaches to report cards and other reporting forms

Forms from over 100 elementary and secondary schools where reporting is considered effective

No single form accomplished all goals – all schools have multi-faceted reporting systems with a report card at the center

Format, organization, and graphic layout are extremely important

Physical characteristics can enhance or detract from the intended message

Must be sure the form does not get in the way of the function

Developing a Model Reporting Form

Best forms are those designed for a specific purpose and intended for a specific audience

Most are content specific

Two major issues:

- What purpose do we want the form to serve?
- What format, method, or structure best serves this purpose?

Information to Include in a Reporting Form

Balance between detail and practicality

Should present a comprehensive picture of students academic strengths and weaknesses

Should be compact, understandable, and not require inordinate time for teachers to prepare or parents to interpret

Separate Grades for Product and Process

Give explicit information to parents about students' academic performance in specific subject areas as well as important feedback about students' social development and work habits

Gives parents a clear picture of child as a learner and allows them to better target improvement efforts when they are needed

Sample:

MATHEMATICS GRADE	1 st B	2 ND	3 RD	4 TH
Demonstrates understanding of concepts	3			
Demonstrates mathematical thinking	4			
Makes mental calculations and reasonable estimations	3			
Uses strategies to solve problems	2			
Collects, organizes & analyzes data	3			
Demonstrates a knowledge of basic facts	2			
Computes accurately	3			
Complete assignments on time	4			

Key: A = Outstanding (90-100% mastery of subject goals)

B = Very Good (80-90% mastery of subject goals)

C = Satisfactory (70-79% mastery of subject goals)

D = Experiencing Difficulty (below 70% Mastery of subject goals)

4 = Consistently or Independently

3 = Usually

2 = Sometimes

1 = Seldom

NE = Not Evaluated

Second partial sample – special section on the report:

Social Development And Work Habits				
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th
Works and plays cooperatively				
Works well independently				
Accepts responsibility for returning homework, books & school-related materials on time				
Uses time profitably				

Separate Grades for Product and Progress

Offer a detailed account of students' progress in compiling a portfolio of work required

Educators identify standards and clearly articulate criteria for meeting the standards

Students collect artifacts to demonstrate their mastery of each standard

Reporting form indicates their progress on all standards

Teacher advisor completes a brief narrative that describes both the level of achievement and amount of progress to date

Students also write recommendations and comments regarding their own work and progress

Another part of the form is a work ethic checklist:

- a) Dresses and grooms in a manner which satisfies the school dress code.
- b) Comes to school on time each day, except for unavoidable personal emergencies & serious illness
- c) Accepts criticism and suggestions in a positive manner
- d) Is present and at work during all school hours

Below, meets, exceeds standard for each

Notes and comments, as well

Using Checklists and Rubrics to Evaluate Students' Performance

Four-page elementary reporting form – first three pages list the standards for each subject area including reading, writing, communication, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, fitness, music, art, and social/learning skills – the last page includes a section for teacher comments and a record of goal-setting information

Extensive documentation accompanies it – curriculum guidebook that describes what each standard means at each grade level, along with the associated skills, and a rubric that defines students' level of progress in meeting each standard

Requires a tremendous amount of parent communication and education

Communicating Information on Self-Assessment and Goal Setting

When standards in a school stress the importance of self-evaluation and goal setting, there must be space devoted on a reporting form for reflection and comments in these two areas

Can be completed during a student-led conference or parent-teacher conference

Provides a focal point for conversations among students, parents, and teachers

Other schools attach an extra page with a section for accomplishments, goals for the next marking period, action plan and parental support

Helps parents and students reflect on progress and set high expectations

Special Comment Sections and Parent Reports to School

Parent feedback assures that parents have read the report and also gives them input into the reporting process

Some students ask for students to write their own comments in a section

Some include a section in which parents can describe students' learning activities at home and the degree of parental involvement – can be in the form of a checklist and can serve as a reminder to parents about the importance of reading to their child or providing extra support at home

- I ask about my child's school day
- I read to my child daily
- I check my child's backpack for notes and schoolwork
- I help my child with homework

Not yet, Sometimes, Most of the time

Reports of Special Services

Checklist of special services provided to the child – just that they received the services – speech and language, reading recovery, learning center or resource room, gifted and talented, 504

Reports on Physical Growth

Information about height and weight or proficiency with particular motor skills – balance and coordination, skills using writing tools

Look carefully at purposes before including such information in a reporting system

Secondary Level Reporting Forms

Information about students' achievement and current level of performance

Sometimes include previous grades to indicate consistency of performance

Some include information about students' progress towards graduation requirements

Attendance and punctuality are also usually included

Short narrative of major learning goals in each class

One or two additional sentences commenting on each student's individual performance

Another page with goal setting and self-evaluation activities and space for parent comments and signature

Technology allows for teachers to be able to record this information for so many students

Combining Methods of Reporting

Most effective combine the following components:

- Checklists that show students' progress toward subject area standards
- Narratives to clarify student strengths or areas of concern in each subject
- Ratings of the student's work habits or social development
- Records of attendance and special services
- Sections for students to complete on self-assessment and goal setting
- Reports of progress on portfolio or service learning requirement
- Space for parents' comments, questions, and signatures

If design efforts begin by establishing purpose of the reporting form, then decisions about what information to include are easier to make

Include all stake-holders in the process

Format, Organization, and Graphic Layout

Statement of purpose

Key to marks and accompanying definitions

Format and graphical layout can be very different and still successful, but they can contribute greatly to the message communicated by the form

Some schools use graphic designers to give advice about different design elements

Font sizes

Print style

Graphic and photo options

Paper quality

Report length
Color

Encouraging Input in the Design Process

Encourage broad-based involvement during the design process

After developing a draft version of a new reporting form, committee members organized parent focus groups at each grade level to gain additional feedback on their work

They were asked to comment on the stated purpose, the marking system, the vocabulary used, the organization, and the design

Excellent changes were made to enhance the form's effectiveness

Committee continues to meet annually to make minor revisions to the form and other elements of school's reporting system

Consistency in Reporting Forms

Terminology and vocabulary

Format and organization across grade levels and from building to building within district

Consistency in conveying the importance of all subject areas

Frequency of Reports

Teachers and parents often disagree – most teachers prefer only 3 or 4; parents prefer 6 or 8

Solution rests in the development of a multifaceted reporting system

Summary

Most important issue that needs to be addressed is to clarify its purpose

Impossible to identify one exemplary form

Must adapt forms to fit particular contexts

Development efforts should be guided by a clear understanding of the knowledge base and involving a broad base of stakeholders

Chapter 10

- *What guidelines can be offered for better grading and reporting systems?*
 - Reporting tools to include in a comprehensive reporting system
 - Set of guiding principles for educators to follow to ensure effective communication and enhancement to student learning

The Importance of Purpose

Critical Aspects in Determining Communication Purposes

- a) What information or message do we want to communicate?
- b) Who is the primary audience for that message?
- c) How would we like that information or message to be used?
- d)

The Challenge of Communication

Teachers and school administrators want to do a better job of communicating with parents, but are fearful of trying

They recognize formidable barriers – both parents working, single parents with heavy responsibilities, transportation difficulties, child-care needs, cultural and language barriers, and some parents just too stressed or depressed to care.

Strong evidence that all parents are willing to help their children succeed in school

Most want information on their children's progress more regularly

Tools for a Comprehensive Reporting System

Mix of traditional and more modern

1. Report Cards

Form the foundation of nearly every reporting system

If primary purpose is communicating to parents teachers' judgments of students' achievement and performance, then parents should be closely involved in developing it

If the primary purpose is to communicate information to students for self-evaluation, then it is students who must be able to understand and accurately interpret the information included and they should be involved in developing it

Clearly state the purpose on the report card itself

2. Notes Attached to Report Cards

Express the principal's interest in each student's learning progress

Allow principals to recognize students' accomplishments and offer encouragement for improvement

Parents, students, and teachers all highly value these notes

3. Standardized Assessment Reports

Often misinterpreted

Often not aligned with curriculum so are not an adequate measure of how well students have learned

Require detailed explanation and parent training

4. Phone Calls to Parents

One of the easiest and most efficient means of communicating

Most underused and misused

Only call when something is wrong or child is in trouble or when child is sick or hurt

Some teachers have started to make regular phone calls and tell students and parents that they will do so in advance

Help teachers keep up to date on their students' lives

Phone Home Program

The Good News – Principal calls immediately from cell phone with good news; hands phone to child, as well

Inform parents of special events and invite participation

First phone call is the hardest

5. Weekly/Monthly Progress Reports

Short check-lists or mini report cards that give parents a brief summary of students' learning progress between report cards

Others are designed simply to inform parents about the curriculum and teachers' expectations

6. School Open-Houses

Parents want to know that their child's teachers are competent and that those teachers care about their child as an individual

Want to know what the teacher has planned for the class, what learning goals have been set, and how the teacher intends to help students reach those goals

Enjoy hearing about special projects, classroom procedures, and tips on how they can help at home

Most important, they want to know that the teacher is personable, approachable, and willing to make special efforts to help students learn

7. *Newsletters to Parents*

One of most effective

Provide parents with everyday details about the school, describe upcoming events, thank parents by name, announce student award winners, provide ideas for specific learning activities that parents can do with their children

Calendars and Handbooks are useful, too

8. *Personal Letters to Parents*

Model honest communication by notifying parents when their child has done exceptionally well or as soon as academic or behavioral problems arise

9. *Evaluated Projects or Assignments*

Highly effective for communicating learning goals and expectations

Single grade offers little

Those accompanied by explicit scoring rubrics provide parents with a clear description of what the teacher expects and the criteria by which students' work is evaluated

10. *Portfolios or Exhibits of Students' Work*

Collections of evidence that serve three major purposes:

To display students' work around a theme

To illustrate the process of learning

To show growth or progress

Most parents say they learn more from portfolios than they do from report cards

Friday Folders serve as a type of portfolio

Exhibits of students' work to show how well students perform in academic tasks

Teachers must articulate the qualities of good work and help students learn to recognize these qualities in their own work to make portfolios and exhibits successful

11. *Homework Assignments*

In high school there is a correlation between homework and measures of achievement and performance – more to do with quality than quantity

In elementary school, homework serves best to inform parents about what students are doing in school and to involve parents in learning tasks

Should be designed so that parents and students can work together

12. *Homework Hotlines*

Recorded message about homework assignment, description, due date

Others specify goal of assignment, offer suggestions for completion, and outline the criteria by which the assignment will be evaluated

Some are actually staffed by teachers or teaching assistants who give kids immediate help

Additional expense and effort but offer a variety of benefits

13. School Web Pages

Information about school and class

Some give up to date assignment information

Allow for two-way communication – email systems

14. Parent-Teacher Conference

Interactive and highly individualized communications

Teachers don't receive training about how to be effective

Can be frustrating for both parents and teachers

Not enough time, long lines, parents don't show up, angry or disgruntled parents

Most effective when they focus on four major issues:

- What is the student able to do?
- What areas require further attention or skill development?
- What help or support does the student need to be successful?
- How is the student doing in relation to established learning standards for students in a similar age range or grade level?

15. Student-Teacher Conferences

Should focus on discussions of the qualities of good work and students' current work in relation to those qualities

Review work samples with specific suggestions for improvement

Emphasize positive expectations for students and willingness to help

Actively listen to students about how to help

16. Student-Led Conferences

Students lead the discussion of reporting on their learning to their parents

Teachers serve primarily as facilitator and observer

Four conducted simultaneously

Students need regular opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their own work

Promote parent involvement

Reviewing a portfolio during a conference

Guidelines for Better Practice

We need to become more thoughtful about what we do

Begin With a Clear Statement of Purpose

- Keep formative and summative purposes clear
- Use multiple reporting tools

Provide Accurate and Understandable Descriptions of Student Learning

- Decide what to include
- Decide how to report
- Communication is two-way

Use Grading and Reporting to Enhance Teaching and Learning

- Communicate to parents and students when using measurement and assessment techniques
- Rethink use of unsound grading practices just because it was "done to you"
- Involve parents

Conclusion

By its very nature, grading is a subjective process.

Subjective does not mean that grades lack credibility or are indefensible.

If professional judgments are to remain meaningful and accurate, teacher must continuously reflect on their purpose for grading, review what information they want to communicate, who is the primary audience for that information, and what result they hope to accomplish.

Evidence used in determining grades must relate directly to what students have learned and can do. Other factors must be reported separately (work habits, behaviors, etc.)

Grading and reporting require careful planning, thoughtful judgment, and a clear focus on purpose, a profound sense of fairness, excellent communication skills, and an overriding concern for students.